**RAPAR**

***The Manchester-based Human Rights Organisation***

**Lydia and Bernard Must Stay Campaign**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

**May 16th 2012**

**LYDIA BESONG AND BERNARD BATEY WIN THEIR ASYLUM CASE**

***Tribunal recognises their political and cultural activities will place them at risk if they are returned to Cameroon***

* **“This is a deeply important victory for everyone interested in ensuring the safety of our refugees” - *Gary McIndoe, Lydia and Bernard’s solicitor***

Cameroon playwright Lydia Besong and her husband Bernard Batey heard today that they have won their asylum case.

Their solicitor Gary McIndoe, of Latitude Law, Manchester, said: “The Tribunal has recognised that Lydia and Bernard’s political and cultural activities will place them at risk if they are returned to Cameroon. This is a deeply important victory for everyone interested in ensuring the safety of our refugees.”

Lydia and Bernard, both long standing human rights activists who currently live in Bury, have fought a high profile campaign for asylum in the UK.

They were forced to flee Cameroon more than five years ago after they were both imprisoned, tortured and persecuted for their political activities as members of the SCNC – Southern Cameroon National Council - a peaceful organisation which campaigns for the independence of Southern Cameroon. While she was in prison, Lydia was raped by a uniformed guard.

Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Africa Tawanda Hondora has said: “Political opposition is not tolerated in Cameroon. Any dissent is suppressed through either violence or abuse of the legal system to silence critics.”

Lydia’s most recent play *Down with the Dictator –* recently performed in Manchester and Bury – is set in Cameroon and explores themes of power, political corruption and censorship. Her earlier play *How I Became an Asylum Seeker* was performed in cities throughout the UK. It helped raise awareness of women who escape persecution in their home countries and seek asylum in the UK.

In Cameroon, Lydia was a teacher and Bernard ran his own business. They claimed asylum when they arrived in the UK at the end of 2006 and were housed in Rochdale where they were members of the congregation at St Ann’s Church, Belfield. The priest and parishioners at St Ann’s have continued to support their campaign. They now live in Bury where they are members of the Bury AcaPeelers Choir and they also have links to Holy Innocent’s Church, Fallowfield, Manchester, one of the venues for the performance of Lydia’s latest play.

The couple, who have both been detained twice over the last two and a half years, have continued their human rights work while they have been living in Greater Manchester. Lydia is a member of the management committee at WAST (Women Asylum Seekers Together) and Bernard, as part of the RAPAR Leadership Group, helped set up Manchester’s first Voucher Exchange Scheme. He also volunteered with a project in Rochdale which worked with refugees and people seeking asylum.

English PEN, the organisation which campaigns for persecuted writers internationally, has supported Lydia and Bernard's campaign for the last three years. High profile supporters also include former Children's Laureate and author of *War Horse* Michael Morpurgo, actor Juliet Stevenson, leading lawyer Baroness Helena Kennedy, Stockport-born writer and broadcaster Baroness Joan Bakewell, and the Bishop of Manchester.

At this year’s Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression annual awards, Michael Morpurgo spoke about Lydia's story and her campaign to remain in the UK.

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